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SECDEF FOR DEFENSE SECURITY COOPERATION AGENCY (DSCA)

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TAGS: MARR MASS MOPS MU

SUBJECT: JUSTIFICATION FOR ARMY TACTICAL MISSILE SYSTEM  
(ATACMS) FOR THE ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN

REF: A. MUSCAT 1065

1B. MUSCAT 829

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) The Embassy Muscat Country Team continues to strongly support and recommend approval of the request for ATACMS for the Royal Army of Oman (RAO). Based on concerns raised during ENDP process, Embassy Muscat has discussed this subject further with Omani officials -- who remain intent on acquiring ATACMS as a high priority item -- and provides below additional justification for the necessary release authorization.

12. (S) The Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (CRAO), Major General Saeed bin Nasser al-Salimi, has communicated clearly that he views the 300km range ATACMS as a critical part of modernizing Oman's defensive capability. During a discussion with OMC Chief, CRAO stated that Oman's military faces a daunting challenge in providing a credible defensive posture given the large size of the country and the relatively small size of the army. He expressed his view that flexibility and the ability to conduct military operations to disrupt a potential adversary's rear areas are essential to Oman's overall defense. Without naming Iran, he intimated that while Oman's relations with all its neighbors are cordial, there are "some" nearby whom they must watch with a wary eye. The CRAO asserted that having the ability to respond to aggression by striking a potential enemy's (i.e., Iran's) homeland or ports would provide some deterrence which may prevent that country from attacking Oman. In this conversation, he further noted that ATACMS would be a strong complement to the F-16s' long-range capability. He also stated clearly that Oman has no intention of initiating an attack against any nation, and that ATACMS would be used strictly for defensive purposes only.

13. (C) In OMC discussions with the CRAO's Director of Operations and Director of Requirements (Force Acquisition), both strongly advocated ATACMS as the exact type of system that would greatly benefit Oman's ability to work with U.S. and other allies (U.K. and GCC) during joint operations. Both Directors also said the RAO will replace its aging artillery units, and that they see HIMARS with ATACMS as a key component of this replacement. They doubted, however, that the RAO would want HIMARS without ATACMS as the army could get the same indirect fire capability through less expensive and easier to maintain conventional artillery pieces.

14. (C) During meetings with the COSSAF's office and with the Office of Under Secretary of Defense Mohammed al-Rasbi, Omani officials similarly indicated that HIMARS with ATACMS are a

top priority for the Sultan's Armed Forces. Both offices gave the same justification for the ATACMS as the CRAO and his staff, and urged as much assistance as possible from the USG on this matter, noting that Oman has consistently been a reliable ally of the United States for over 35 years. (Note: Under Secretary al-Rasbi told visiting U.S. officials during the October 31 U.S.-Oman Gulf Security Dialogue meeting in Muscat (ref A) that he welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate Oman's need for ATACMS to bolster the Sultanate's defense capabilities. End Note.)

¶5. (S) Embassy Muscat understands that questions may exist regarding the ENDP release of ATACMS to Oman. The Department of State's Office of Regional Security and Arms Transfers, in particular, has written that, &Since it is clear from diplomatic reporting that Oman does not consider Iran to be a direct threat and Omani military officials have indicated that a purchase of ATACMS is not foreseen in the next few years, we would appreciate further justification for the sale of such a highly capable system.<sup>8</sup> Embassy Muscat would like to clarify that the Oman military views the purchase of ATACMS as one of its top priorities. The actual purchase is dependent upon both the speed of our FMS system and, due to declining FMF, the RAO's budget constraints.

¶6. (S) Furthermore, while the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs has consistently opposed preemptive military action against Iran and does not see Iran as a direct threat at this time, Omani civilian officials nevertheless remain very worried about Iranian behavior. The Sultan, in particular, has acknowledged Iran's destabilizing actions and is concerned over Tehran's nuclear program. The Omani military and security services take a very pragmatic view of the Iranian threat ) one that is closer to that of the U.S. ) and, as noted above, have expressed a desire to expand Oman's deterrent defensive capability in the event Iran takes a more aggressive posture towards Oman and the rest of the GCC.

¶7. (U) For the reasons expressed above, Embassy Muscat urges timely approval of Oman's request to purchase HIMARS with ATACMS.

GRAPPO